



Tompkins County Election Worker News

Tompkins County
Board of Elections

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"To make democracy work, we must be a nation of participants, not simply observers." – Louis L'Amour

New Voting Machines Countywide!



This year we complete our transition to optical scan voting machines. (Pictured at left.) By law, we can no longer use the old lever-style machines. (School districts may be allowed to use them for a bit longer for their elections.)

Some of you have had experience with the new voting system already. Voters in the City of Ithaca used it last November, as did voters in this year's Village elections.

The good news is we have experienced very few problems with the new system. Most voters and poll workers quickly adapted to the new procedures.

The machines themselves have been very reliable. And more importantly, our random audits, conducted after each election, have shown the machines to be 100% accurate.

Changes at the Poll Site

With the new machines also come changes in how we set up and staff poll sites. As usual, there will be a table where bi-partisan Inspectors sign in the voters. The Inspectors will then issue a paper ballot to the voter. The voter takes the ballot to a privacy booth to mark his or her choices, then takes the ballot to the voting machine and inserts it.

Instead of a Chairperson, each poll site will now have at least two Poll Site Managers. These are Inspectors who have received additional training in the operation of the voting machine, including the ballot marking device (BMD) option for voters with a disability. The Poll Site Managers are responsible for the initial set up of the machines and poll site. They will be available to help with any machine-related problems. At the end of the night, the Poll Site Managers will shut down and seal the machine, and prepare the poll closing bag for a quick return to the BOE.

Important Dates

Voting Machine Demos:

July 10, Danby Fire Station, 10 am-2 pm

Aug. 10, Dryden Community Café, 10-2
Aug. 12, The Shops at Ithaca, 10-2

Aug. 17, Kendal, 10-2
Aug. 21, Groton Town Hall, 11-3

Aug. 28, Brooktondale Comm. Center, 10-2

Aug. 23-Sept. 8, various dates and times: Inspector and Poll Site Manager training for September Primary.

September 14: Primary Election

As of this Newsletter, we expect that there will be Primary Elections in all election districts. Polls open noon to 9 p.m. (Inspectors arrive by 11:30 a.m., Poll Site Managers by 11:00 a.m.)

November 2: General Election

Polls open 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. (Inspectors arrive by 5:30 a.m., Poll Site Managers by 5:00 a.m.)

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Another change is that inspectors will no longer have to call in results at the end of the night. Instead, a small memory card from each machine will be brought to the BOE, where the results can be read into a tallying program.

And (most importantly!), since we don't have Canvass Sheets anymore, all Inspectors and Poll Site Managers must sign the Ballot Log form, because that is the document we will refer to when issuing pay checks.

Voter Privacy

One issue we want everyone to pay special attention to is voter privacy. Previously, voters were able to "close the curtain" while they voted, but now, even with "privacy booths" for filling out the ballot, some voters have said they feel like they don't have enough privacy.

This is often a matter of perception. Poll workers need to balance the need to be available for help with the need to maintain strict voter privacy. Poll Site Managers must not stand right at the machine. Privacy concerns are another reason not to let voters hang around the poll site socializing.

We have taken a close look at poll site layout with privacy issues in mind, so it is important to stick to the layout diagram we provide. Privacy booths need to be positioned so that when voters mark their ballots they feel that no one can see their choices. The BMD portion of the machine must be positioned so that no one but the voter using it can see the screen. And remember, Privacy Sleeves are available for voters to use to hold their ballots until their ballots are inserted in the scanner.

Please let us know if you have any suggestions for improving voter privacy at your poll site.

Can You Top This?

Last November at the General Election in New York City a naked man was noticed standing outside a poll site. An inspector reported, "We tried to tell him to get his thoughts together. I told him put your clothes back on, or they're gonna take you down to Bellevue." Which is what happened when the police arrived. Well, at least he didn't try to vote...

If you have any interesting election day stories, contact Tom Paolangeli (tpaolangeli@tompkins-co.org, or 274-5522) and we'll try to include them in an upcoming Election Worker News.

Contact Information

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New Look for BOE Web Site

For the latest election related information, go to www.votetompkins.com. By mid July we will have a new, more user-friendly look. Be sure to check out the "For Election Workers" tab on the homepage.